


To combat opioid crisis, California Take-Back Drugs program available for Pass area

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The opioid epidemic has ripped apart communities throughout the United States; and the Pass area has not been spared.

Many people have leftover prescription medications, including attention-deficit medications such as Adderall, pain medications such as Vicodin or even antibiotics.

In some cases prescription medication users might voluntarily give their medication to somebody, or it could be taken from them, which becomes part of the illegal drug supply cycle.

The misuse of prescription painkillers, heroin and synthetic opioids like fentanyl tops the world in drug deaths; in 2017 70,237 people died from overdoses — with 67.8 percent involving an opioid — far greater than deaths involving car accidents or gun violence.

It is not just the homeless population: it is next-door neighbors, teens, parents, grandparents and people with jobs, to name a few. It could be anyone.

One way to avoid misuse or harmful effects on the environment is to dispose of the medications properly at bins, because disposing of medications by flushing them down the toilet or thrown in the garbage both directly and indirectly contaminates water systems and soil.

The Department of Health Care Services aims to combat the epidemic by providing federal grants for medicine disposal bins across California, which will prevent medications from being stockpiled in homes, flushed down the toilet, or thrown in the trash.

This is a local implementation of a nationwide push for wider availability of safe drug disposal.

“Proper disposal of medications helps ensure they don’t get misused and abused if they end up in the wrong hands,” said Program Manager Nate Pelczar. “It can decrease the chances of unused medications leading to accidental poisoning, misuse and overdose.”

The program, known as the California Drug Take-Back Program, provides support that covers the cost of the medicine bin, free professional installation, free technical support, and free servicing through August 2020 for DEA approved locations: pharmacies, hospitals and law enforcement agencies.

The program allows community members to safely turn in their medications — no questions asked.

Bins can accept both controlled and non-controlled medications for people and pets. The receptacles are sealed and picked up by a company named Covanta that properly discards medicines at their facility.

Further, the bins should drive residents to the pharmacy, and the Department of Health Care Services hopes the customers will return.

Pelczar said “We have seen an uptick in return customers who use the bins and uses the pharmacy. It’s good for business, too.”

After an application is completed, the turnaround is quick — it takes one to two weeks to receive a bin.

Pelczar said the program is a means to address a public issue.

“The sooner we can get the drugs, the safer the community is,” he said.

The bins can remain on the property of the host location beyond the duration of the grant.

The nearest bins are in Hemet; at city of Hemet Police Department.

Pharmacies, hospitals, and law enforcement departments interested in participating in this program and receiving a free medicine collection bin may complete an application at takebackdrugs.org.

This isn’t the only instance where the opioid epidemic has been addressed in the Pass area recently. There has been a push from the community to educate citizens about the harmful effects of opioids. At a meeting at the Beaumont Library, community members and guests spoke about their personal and professional experiences with the opioid crisis.